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Labour Assoc. for  
Promoting Co-operative...

Eight years' work of the  
Labour Association...

London

[1893?]

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1310 EIGHT YEARS' WORK (1883-1892)

OF THE

## LABOUR ASSOCIATION

FOR PROMOTING

CO-OPERATIVE PRODUCTION BASED ON THE  
CO-PARTNERSHIP OF THE WORKERS,

9 JOHN STREET, ADELPHI, LONDON, W.C.

WE hear everywhere of the Labour question—the conflicts of Capital and Labour never cease. It is the object of the Labour Association to end them, by making the worker himself owner, or part-owner, of the capital with which he works, carrying on business in partnership with other workers, whether of hand or head, choosing with them the manager or committee, and sharing with them the profits or losses. Into this position he is to come by receiving as worker a dividend upon his wages out of the profits of the business, just as the capitalist receives a dividend upon his capital. This is not taking anything from those that have; it comes out of what is now wasted. Such a system stimulates the worker to better work and greater care, and it tends to prevent stoppages. Out of the extra profit so earned comes the worker's dividend, and with his accumulated dividend he becomes a partner. Thus would each successive generation of workers find an open door to partnership.

Profit-sharing, therefore, is one branch of our work, but it is not our final goal.

Where consumers combine together to provide themselves with what they need, that is one thing. Where producers combine to make and sell what they know how to make, that is a totally different thing. Unfortunately we have but one word for the two. They are both co-operation; but the first is consumers' co-operation,—the second, which we aim at, is producers' co-operation.

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And yet the first was started by men whose ideal was to employ themselves,—the savings of the store were to provide the means. But it was found much easier to employ others in making things they needed to consume, than to employ themselves in making what they must afterwards sell. So consumers' co-operation became a great employer of labour. In England, unhappily, its workers are employed almost always merely as wage servants, and have no more share in the success or management of their labour than if they worked for an ordinary limited company.

There have always been some to protest against co-operation so treating its employees, and to hold up the ideal of self-governing and profit-sharing workshops, depending upon themselves for success, but federated together for the distribution of their products and other common purposes. A number of such men—the late E. Vansittart (at Rugby”), E. O. Greening, (at the Derby Co-operative Labour Association, “for pro- on the Co-partnership of the

Since then the Association has worked steadily on, with some discouragements, indeed, for self-government in any domain of life is difficult, but on the whole with great reason to rejoice. For one thing, it has seen the growth of co-operation upon its principles, shown in the following figures:—

	1883.	1891-92.
Number of Societies,	15	47
Members,	2,557	11,050
Capital,	£103,436	£326,839
Sales,	£160,751	£666,688
Profit (net),	£8,917	£37,601

The progress has thus been about fourfold. It would be foolish to claim it all as due to the Association's work, but we have at least had a large share in stirring up a desire for self-employment, in advising nascent societies, in guiding and supporting and making known many in their early struggles, and in opening up a market for all.

Our first year's report (for 1884-85) is mainly concerned with the formation of the Association. Our second speaks, in few words, of a steady growth of the movement, of much work done by us with

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small means, of many meetings, conferences, and lectures. Such work has never ceased, and it is not too much to say that a marked effect upon the opinion of all classes has been produced.

4 June 1919 For History

It has always been a great aim of the Labour Association to induce the consumers' societies to put their workshops upon a truly co-operative basis. Year after year our friends have carried their resolution at the Co-operative Congress. In this second report, unavailing representations in this sense to the Co-operative Wholesale Society, the great federation of consumers' societies, are recorded. The next contains the commentary. The men in their Leicester boot factory went on strike, being mere wage servants, having no other way to redress their grievances. Not being able to arrange arbitration, the Labour Association encouraged them to carry out a plan they had long before formed, and commence a factory of their own. They started with £220 capital, employing four or five hands. Last year they employed 250; they sold £33,000 worth of boots; their capital was £6,666; their profit nearly £2,000; and they are still growing.

In the fourth report (1887-88) the exhibition of Co-operative Products first makes an important feature. From the beginning the Labour Association had, by exhibiting samples at its lectures, and in other ways, tried to bring these goods before the public. The scale of its efforts gradually increased, until in August 1888 more than 40 Societies exhibited their goods at the Crystal Palace Co-operative Flower Show and Festival. The Exhibition was a great success, and has been followed with increasing success by four others at the same place, and many similar ones elsewhere.

The fifth and sixth reports tell of progress on all the old lines. In the seventh, bringing us down to March 1892, the great feature is the establishment in London of the permanent Depot at 36 Hart Street, Bloomsbury, for the exhibition and sale of co-operative products. This had long been contemplated. The great difficulty of our Societies had not been making, nor even managing, but marketing. For although in many co-operative stores the officials and committee have every desire to sell co-operative productions, yet they are unable to do this beyond the demands of their members, who, like other people, tend to buy what they are used to; and it takes time to introduce the products of new co-operative workshops. The Wholesale,

large manufacturers themselves, with large schemes for future growth, have no time to encourage independent co-operative producers, while to the competitive shopkeeper or merchant the word "co-operative" was as a red rag to a bull. The struggling societies could only fight at great disadvantages for a share of custom at the individual stores and in the open market. The Dépôt is helping them here, and as it gets known must help them more and more, for their goods are as cheap as any other of the same high quality made under conditions free from sweating. Where else can one go and be sure there is no taint of that?

One hears much of the failure of Co-operative Production,—and there have been failures, as there have been failures of political self-government. Especially has this been the case when the impulse has come from well-to-do friends. It is good to advise and assist; but if the impulse be not in the workers themselves, nothing can supply the want. However, the failures of true co-operative societies, in our sense, have never been anything like so numerous as is generally supposed, and they are becoming fewer and fewer.

We do not, however, offer co-partnership as a panacea,—very far from it. Those workers who are fit for it are indeed a vast army in the aggregate; but so are those who are unfit, at least as yet. Nor, again, are all businesses suitable, as yet, even though they may be for the other branch of our work, profit-sharing. Still, the field immediately open to us is enormous.

It is not, however, merely the future magnitude, much less the present material prosperity, of the movement we think most of, but its educational and moral value. Its effects have been seen again and again. Starting from small beginnings, each society, as it grows, educates its members; they acquire business experience and habits, but, still more, learn to make sacrifices, to face difficulties and disappointments, to rely upon themselves, and to work with others. In the industrial world, as in the personal and political, self-government is the highest education.

But not only in its direct effects is the movement so valuable. Indirectly, also, it greatly assists the progress of labour. Each society

is a centre of resource for the workers in its trade, where they may hope for employment, or at least help, in a wages dispute; but still more, it is a centre of knowledge enabling reasonable claims to be supported, and preventing unreasonable ones from being made. This is not mere theory: it is actual experience that our Societies act as mediators, and that where they are found, trade disputes, strikes, and lock-outs, unknown in their own workshops, are greatly mitigated around them.

The future is full of hope. The Scottish Wholesale Society has just admitted its workers to full partnership. The leaders of Trades Unions are looking more and more to Co-operative Production, and urging their members to make common cause with us, if only to be sure of avoiding sweated goods. On the other hand, many employers and large companies have taken steps in the direction of profit-sharing, and even beyond. There is much the Association might do, if a little more money and a few more helpers were forthcoming. We have experience of the difficulties, which are many, and we know the lines of least resistance. All the work above described is being carried on. In addition, we advise intending Societies as to their chances of success (few of them, for instance, realise the difficulty of marketing), and existing ones in overcoming their difficulties; we help the former in drafting their rules, and getting them passed by the registrar; we collect the facts as to the movement, and disseminate them in publications and in lectures. In short, in innumerable ways, we strive to promote our principle. We therefore invite all those who sympathise with its object to support the Labour Association, by subscribing, however small a sum, to its funds, or by personal assistance.

We have only one paid officer; except this, and an occasional small payment for loss of time, our work is all done gratuitously. Our whole funds are spent on propaganda.

Our thirty societies affiliated to the Labour Association have 9,000 members, and among our 200 other supporters are some of the best known statesmen, political economists, and labour leaders in the country, as may be seen from the list appended.

Our Secretary will be happy to send copies of our Report and other literature to those interested.

9 JOHN STREET, ADELPHI, W.C.

## OFFICERS.

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 Wilson, H. J., M.P.  
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The following Societies are affiliated to the Labour Association :—

SOCIETIES.	ADDRESS.
Agricultural and Horticultural Association.....	Creek Road, Deptford; and 3 Agar Street, Strand, London, W.C.
Airedale Worsted .....	Fulton Street, Bradford, Yorkshire.
Alcester Needle .....	Near Post Office, Alcester.
Brighton Artisans .....	32 North Road, Brighton.
Coventry Watch.....	37 Mount Street, Coventry.
Eccles Quil .....	Silk Street, Eccles.
Edinburgh Printing .....	Bristo Place, Edinburgh.
General Builders .....	London.
Gorton Surdries.....	Gorton, near Manchester.
Hebden Bridge Fustian .....	Nutclough Works, Hebden Bridge.
Hinckley Hosiery .....	New Street, Hinckley.
Hinckley Foot .....	Hinckley.
Keighley Ironworks .....	Goulbourne Street, Keighley.
Kettering Foot and Shoe .....	Haverlock Works, Kettering.
Leicester Boot and Shoe .....	Bede Street, Braunstone Gate.
Leicester Hosiery .....	Cranbourne Street Mills, Leicester.
London Productive .....	Cocoa Works, Thames Ditton, Surrey.
Midland Tinplate .....	Brasshouse Lane, Birmingham.
Northamptonshire Boots (Army).....	Wollaston, Northampton.
Paisley Manufacturing .....	114 Causeyside Street, Paisley.
Co-operative Federation .....	Leicester.
Scotch Tweed.....	Selkirk Mills, Ettrick, N.B.
Sheffield Cutlery .....	Leicester Street, Sheffield.
Wm. Thomson & Sons, Woollen Cloth	Woodhouse Mills, Huddersfield.
Walsall Pailock.....	317 Green Lane, Walsall.



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